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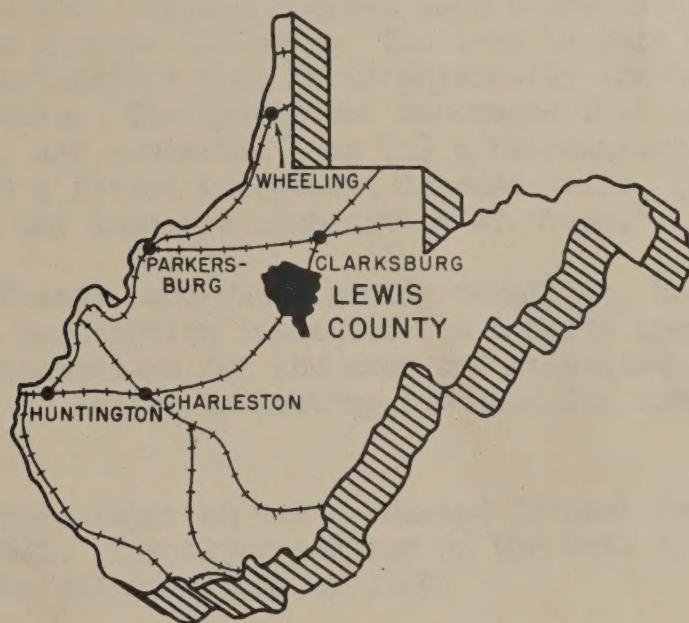
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
BUREAU OF AGRICULTURAL ECONOMICS

in cooperation with

LEWIS COUNTY LAND USE PLANNING COMMITTEE

▼

A STUDY OF PEOPLE AND CONDITIONS
IN A LOW-INCOME FARMING AREA OF
SOUTHERN LEWIS COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA



By C. R. DRAPER
Junior Sociologist

EXPLANATION

The area included in the following study has come to be known locally as the "C" or "blue" area because of the letter and color used to indicate it on the Lewis County Land-Use Classification Map.

It was first mapped, classified, and described by the Ireland Community Land-Use Planning Committee whose work was later carefully examined and approved by both the Lewis County Land-Use Planning Committee and the West Virginia Land-Use Planning Advisory Committee.

The Lewis County Unified Program Report presents the original description of the area as follows: "The land in this area is so steep, poor or inaccessible that it is physically and economically unsuited to agriculture. The Committees recommend that the area be purchased, evacuated, and converted into (1) a recreational area, (2) a game preserve, (3) a forest management demonstration, (4) a flood control area, or (5) any feasible combination of these."

The Lewis County Land-Use Planning Committee, however, considered this initial description inadequate as a basis upon which to develop sound recommendations for the area and requested that the following study be made to assist in meeting the need for more complete information.

The study here reported was conducted between October 15, 1940 and February 1, 1941. The major portion of the data presented in the tables embraces the calendar year of 1940.

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OF
SOUTHERN LEWIS COUNTY, WEST VIRGINIA

By C. R. Draper, Junior Sociologist

INTRODUCTION

Lewis County, West Virginia, has at its southern tip a piece of rugged land comprising approximately 9 square miles. This tip differs sharply from the more gently rolling hill land immediately to the north, but is similar to the adjoining land in the three neighboring counties. The area is drained by a dozen or more streams and runs, which have cut it into a series of steep valleys and narrow ridges, with only occasional narrow strips of level bottomland and hilltop flats. Forty-six percent of the land area has a slope of 40 percent or more, the generally accepted limit for even the most extensive types of farming in the State.

The land was at one time heavily timbered, and logging operations together with some coal mining once furnished many of those who lived in the area with the greater part of their income. But it has been 20 years or more since much timber cutting has been carried on; and sometime shortly before 1930, the narrow-gauge railroad, which had hauled coal and lumber from the vicinity, was taken out. Some farming has evidently been done in this locality since the time it was first settled, but obviously the land has never supported much agriculture on a commercial scale. In a large measure the farming of the area always has been of a soil-and moisture-depleting, subsistence type.

In 1939, the Ireland Community Land-Use Planning Committee, classifying the land in the southern part of Lewis County on the basis of its best use, placed this 9 square miles of rough country into the classification of "Land now in farms in which farming should be discontinued, and the land put to some other use". Although its membership did not include a representative from this southernmost part of the county, the Committee was well acquainted with the area and considered it a problem area, with low incomes, a low tax base, relatively high costs to the county for public services, and poor chances for agriculture.

AIMS OF THE PRESENT STUDY

This report is the result of a study, requested by the Lewis County Land-Use Planning Committee, to find out more about the human element in this total problem situation. In the survey an attempt was made to get information as to the present conditions of people living here, something of their background, and their attitudes toward their present situation and the future. This material is primarily for the use of planning bodies and action agencies in trying to understand better the nature of the problems, both on this relatively small area and in similar places elsewhere in the State, as a first step in any attempt to correct the maladjustments with sound planning and remedial measures.

The study was made by interviewing one or more members of each

of the 63 families in the locality and combining the information, which was taken down on schedules prepared for this study, with the opinions of the County Land-Use Planning Committee. Other information was obtained from records of county Departments of Health, Welfare, and Education, or from interviews with their representatives.

PLANNING COMMITTEES' JUDGMENT VERIFIED

Results of the survey in general bear out or emphasize the opinions of the County Land-Use Planning Committee and substantiate their appraisal of the situation and its effect on social and economic conditions. The inhabitants themselves, with a few exceptions, admit that the area is largely unsuited for farming.

Farm Productivity.

Productivity of each farm was rated Good, Average, or Poor, as compared with farms throughout the county, on the basis of the 1940 yields of corn, hay, and wheat, and of pasture carrying capacity where this figure could be obtained.

Fifteen families, or nearly a one-fourth, either made no use of their land for crops and pasture or had no farm land (table 1); 73 percent of the farms on which crops were raised were rated Poor, and the remaining 27 percent were Average, or slightly below. None could be rated Good.

Indications of the inability of agriculture alone to support the population are shown by the low incomes, the small size of many farms, the tenure, the high proportion of families found on county relief rolls, and the low level of living the most evident signs of which are the living conditions.

Incomes.

The general level of income is low; the annual average cash income for the entire group is only \$370 gross (table 2), while half the households had a total gross cash income of less than \$200 for the year. The area does not support many full-time farmers. Twelve of the 63 families received all their cash income from the sale of farm products during the last year, while 19 depended entirely on off-farm income, and 21 were supported entirely by public aid in one form or another, including pensions and pay checks from the Works Progress Administration. The average annual gross cash income of the relief group was \$140 more than the average for the families who were dependent upon their farms for all cash income during the year. Highest average gross cash receipts were made by the 12 families who were classed as part-time farmers. The two most successful farmers were included in the part-time farming group.

Size of Holdings.

The Lewis County Land-Use Planning Committee agreed, in a recent

meeting, that on the better farm land of the county, about 90 acres of almost completely cleared land would be required by an average farm family of good farming ability to make it possible for them to pay for the farm and still live reasonably well. Yet in the area covered by this survey, containing some of the poorest farm land in the country, 73 percent of the families live on farms of less than 90 acres (table 3). A fifth of the farms consist of less than 10 acres, and well over half are smaller than 50 acres. There is a large extent of non-agricultural land on most of the farms in this area.

Tenure.

About half the households live on land they own, while 11 others are renting or leasing their land (table 4). Another 13 families are what might be called squatter families, living on the places they occupy without paying rent to any landlord. In many of these cases, a more or less distant member of the family is owner or part owner, and allows his kin to occupy the land without charge.

In case of seven of the families, the tenure status is not certain. These include a number of folk living on "heirship land", the title to which has not been cleared.

Relief Rolls.

Although one-fifth of the families were mentioned as being entirely dependent on relief aid from one or more sources for their cash income in the year preceding this study, nearly two-thirds received some sort of public aid during the year covered by this investigation. At least 70 percent, and probably more, have been on relief rolls at some time during the last 5 years.

Living Conditions.

As might be expected, living conditions among the people in the area are generally rather poor. Forty-three percent of the homes are of rough-sawed, board-and-batten "shack" construction, and another 29 percent are unpainted frame houses, in varying states of disrepair (table 5). Nearly half (46 percent) of the families have less than the equivalent of one room per person for living space. Field observations indicate that many of the households do not have facilities for proper sanitation.

Home conveniences are few (table 6). No power or telephone lines serve the homes within the area. One family, however, has a small lighting plant. Only two homes have water piped into the house; six have a kitchen sink; seven have power-driven washing machines. Eleven of the 63 families have some kind of motor vehicle, and 26 have radios.

It is not possible at this time to describe accurately the general level of health in the area but 33, or more than half the heads of families, reported some disability or chronic physical ailment which

either interferes seriously with normal occupational activities, or actually renders them unable to do the kind of hard work demanded by farming. If this is true of heads of families, it is not probable that the population as a whole could be rated high as to health.

Distance to Services.

There is one hard-surfaced road which traverses the area for a distance of 2.5 miles, but the others are dirt roads, impassable during certain seasons, and seldom in good repair. Nine families live directly on the hard road, but the rest live at an average distance of a mile from any hard-surfaced highway (table 7). Fourteen of the homes cannot be reached by automobile at any season of the year.

Most families are less than a mile from the nearest rural church, and the average distance to a public elementary school is over one mile. But highschool students must travel either to Walkerville or Webster Springs, depending upon which school bus is easiest to reach on foot. The average distance to these secondary schools is about 14 miles. The nearest doctors are in Buckhannon, Webster Springs, or Weston, so each home call means that a doctor must make a round trip of 50 miles or more, except in the case of two families. Adequate medical care would be difficult to get even if these families were able to pay for it.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE POPULATION

The foregoing paragraphs are probably enough to give weight to the Land-Use Planning Committees' opinion that the extreme southern end of the county is a problem area. But any agencies dealing with problems which the area presents, will be dealing not only with land but also with people, so it will be necessary to know about the inhabitants of the area.

Age Distribution and Fertility.

The 63 households are made up of 326 people who range in age from a few weeks to 94 years. The sex ratio is 124 males per 100 females. In comparison both with the county and with similar populations (rural farm) in the State and Nation, the inhabitants of this area are potentially a rapidly multiplying group. That is to say, the group has a comparatively high proportion (44 percent) of children under 15 years of age (table 8), and a high ratio of children under 5 to women of child-bearing age (764 per thousand). But there are in the group relatively few young adults and older adolescents, aged 15 to 30 years. Apparently these young people have tended to migrate from the area when the opportunity came.

There are 16 broken or "remnant" families, in which death or separation has left a single person, or one parent, with the children (table 9). This group also includes elderly couples left alone by migration of the children from home.

Children Away From Home.

One reason for the predominance of men and boys in the present population is gained by a look at the record of the children who have left home. The number of daughters who have made their homes elsewhere is just twice that of the sons. The daughters have tended to move farther from home than their brothers, who in a number of cases have stayed in the area (table 10).

There is some reason to believe that, on the whole, children who have left home have bettered themselves. Occupations of the sons and daughters who moved show a higher proportion of salaried positions than are found among wage-earners in the area. And although no accurate check was made, it is probable that the boys and girls who became, or who married, farmers in other parts of the county have better chances for success than they did at home.

Attitudes.

Of considerable importance to those who plan toward bringing about readjustments in a problem area, is a knowledge of its inhabitants' opinions and prejudices. An attempt has been made to find out some of the people's attitudes toward their own situation and toward certain changes. The information obtained is unfortunately far from reliable, for the investigator, in gathering this sort of data, runs the danger of arousing suspicion and ill will by asking questions that give local people the idea that changes are about to be forced on them by some unknown governmental body.

To get at the question of how nearly satisfied the people are with present conditions, a representative of each family (in most cases the head) was asked whether he thought the farm was producing what the family considered an adequate living. If the answer was No, he was then asked whether the farm could be made to provide an adequate living if some changes were made. In 47 of the cases, or 77 percent, in which a reply was given, the answer to the first question was No. But of these, 17 said they believed certain changes (principally more capital, or more land) would make the farm yield an adequate living. This means that nearly half the households see no hope for getting a decent living from the land alone. And there is little doubt that what many of the inhabitants mean by an adequate living takes into account only a more plentiful food supply, and not total cash needs.

The question of their willingness to sell for a "reasonable" price cannot be answered conclusively, for nearly half the families "have no say" as to what shall be done with the land they occupy. Of the landowners, probably not more than half would willingly sell, even for what they would consider a proper price—and in many cases this would be far above present land values. Some of the landowners acquired their holdings during a time when prices were high; others would undoubtedly ask a higher price from public purchasers than from private ones; while to several, long residence on the property has endowed it with a personal

value which would be hard to justify from the standpoint of economics alone.

More than half the householders gave the impression that they would be willing to sell or move elsewhere if they could get better land or a more favorable location in exchange. But, naturally, they are skeptical about the possibilities of improving their situation without somehow getting financial help.

BACKGROUNDS

In trying to understand what sort of people are found in this low-income area, it is probably as important to study their history as to inquire about the present situation. Nativity, occupational experience and capacity, and information having to do with the history of their moves should receive careful study.

Place of Birth.

Everyone in the area studied is native-born, of native parentage, and, with few exceptions, male and female heads of families were born within the State (table 11). All but one of the husbands and two of the wives are native West Virginians.

Parents of both husbands and wives were also native-born, and nearly all (90 percent) were natives of the State as well. Whatever the causes are which combined to make this a low-income area, racial mixture or replacement of local stock by outsiders, evidently cannot be blamed.

Occupational Backgrounds and Capacity.

Unfortunately there is no simple and accurate method of estimating what a man could do under a different set of circumstances. Although it is unfair to conclude that all those having low incomes and unsuccessful farms are therefore incompetent, many people—including a number who are farming in the area—are convinced that lack of ability and initiative are responsible for most local troubles.

It was said earlier that about half the family heads, through some disability or other, are physically handicapped. These would probably be no more successful as farmers elsewhere. As to the others, it is difficult to say whether simply a change to better land would insure their success.

For one thing, the general occupational pattern in the area is that of the part-time, small-scale farmer. The past occupational history of nearly all the able-bodied men reads the same, including various combinations of farming, lumbering, mining, and work on the roads. Variations are found occasionally, such as carpentering, labor in mills or factories, and work in the oil and gas fields. Three men were stranded by the withdrawal of the narrow-gauge railroad, which had furnished most of their cash income. The physical nature of the land in this area is

not suited to commercial farming and a mixed occupational pattern prevails. Wages obtained from lumbering and other jobs were evidently necessary to supplement the small farm income which their land yielded.

Mobility.

Successful farming communities are generally found to have a stable population, which is slow to move from place to place. The inhabitants of the problem area in Lewis County, however, seem to have little of this characteristic. Heads of families were asked to give the number of residential changes made since the family's beginning, and these figures were converted to a score showing the relative frequency of moves (table 12).

The average for all families was about one move each 4 years since the marriage of the head. Families whose total cash income was made from sales of farm produce were the least mobile group, while those who got no cash income from the farm were most mobile.

Origins.

A good deal of this moving about has apparently been done within a rather small area. Each family was asked where it was living before moving to the present home, and when these answers were tabulated, they showed that more than half the families (62 percent) moved from somewhere else inside the problem area. Eleven families (table 13) moved in from adjoining counties, but since the topography of much of the surrounding area is rough like that of the area under study, it is probable that most of these 11 came from similar localities.

Householders were also asked to give the principal reasons for deciding to move to the present location. The reasons offered, though probably not too accurate, give the impression that a large number of the families (48 percent) made at least the last shift in residence because unfavorable circumstances forced them to do so. Among the reasons given were: "no work elsewhere"; "poor health"; "less rent (or none) to be paid here"; "failed at farming (or some other occupation) elsewhere"; "burned out"; or "put off" for one reason or another.

CONCLUSIONS

It is not the purpose of this report to offer advice or suggestions as to what should or should not be done. But it may be justifiable, on the basis of the information presented, to suggest the probable results of several possible lines of activity.

(1) The first possibility is that no change in present activities will be made by governmental or other agencies in the problem area. The population has apparently been slowly diminishing, over a period of 30 or 40 years, but the present high reproduction rate means that the number of mouths to be fed will increase unless there is a large migration out of the area. If relief agencies and public works continue

to operate as they do now, it is probable that income from these sources will continue to be distributed among the people, and will perhaps maintain them. But there is no prospect that the present low level of living will rise. Work in the woods will, if anything, decrease; and unless there is some artificial stimulation from governmental agencies, the prospect for agriculture is that it, too, will decline.

At least temporarily the effect of Land-Use Planning has been to check somewhat the amount of aid, to farmers in this area, given by the agricultural programs. This was because the planners felt that the area's unproductiveness made doubtful the possibilities of rehabilitation by means of the usual programs. Recommendations have been made to these agencies to change their emphasis to a type of aid better suited to the problem area.

(2) The second possibility is that some action agency (which probably would have to work against local opposition in the area) might take over the land for public use, compensating the present owners for their property. As only about half the householders live on their own land, these 32 are all that would receive any cash benefits in such an arrangement; and it is doubtful that this would be enough to permit them to relocate on good land, without going considerably into debt.

Little information is available as to what becomes of people living on West Virginia land that is later taken over by State or Federal bodies. But in the case of these 63 families, the history of their previous moves suggests that, without considerable guidance, very many of them would probably move onto similar land in Lewis or other counties where their chances for improvement would be no greater than they are now. The rehabilitation phase of the problem would not be improved thereby.

(3) The third possibility might be some modification of the one just mentioned. Public or other agencies might develop a program or policy by means of which further migration into the area would be discouraged, while encouragement would be offered to those wanting to leave. The effect of such a policy would probably not be felt for some time, because of the low average age of the present population. Eventually, however, (and within a reasonably short time, if the out-migration of young adults noted on page 5 was stimulated), the effect would be a diminishing population, with better chances, for those who remained, to improve their situation. The pattern of land ownership would probably change also, with the average size of holdings becoming larger. Purchase of the whole territory at that later date, if still advisable, would then affect a much smaller number of people.

The immediate effects of this policy would probably not be toward raising the level of living for those in the area, unless they got additional help from one source or another. But the level could undoubtedly be raised some, without necessarily increasing the cash income, if families were actively encouraged to make their home gardens and livestock yield a larger, more varied, and better balanced food supply, and

even if those on subsistence farms could be encouraged to make the wisest use of the land they have.

If families continue to live in the area, there is an additional consideration. Since a large number of the comparatively numerous young people brought up here migrate elsewhere in the county and state, it might well be of public concern to see that adequate provision is made for these children's health and education.

Table 1. - Distribution of farms
according to productivity

Productivity	Number	Percentage
Good	0	0
Average	8	13
Below Average	5	8
Poor	35	55
No crops, no farm	15	24
Total	63	100

1. Yields of various crops were rated as follows:

	Poor	Average	Good
Corn (cans)	60 bu. an Acre	100	over 125
Wheat	12 bu. an Acre	18	over 20
Oats	20 bu. an Acre	26	over 30
Soybeans	Less 1T per Acre	1½T	over 2T
Hay	Less 1T per Acre	1½T	over 2T
Pasture 1/	6 - 8 per Animal Unit	5A/Animal Unit	3A/Animal Unit

1/ Pasture was measured by the number of acres needed to maintain one Animal Unit.

Table 2. - Distribution of gross incomes for 12 months preceding the survey, according to income type

Gross Income in Dollars:	Income Type ^{1/}					All Families	
	S.S	P.T	N.F	R		Number	Percent
0 - 49	-	1	3	2		6	10
50 - 99	1	1	3	-		5	8
100 - 149	3	3	2	5		13	20
150 - 199	2	1	2	-		5	8
200 - 299	3	-	3	2		8	13
300 - 399	2	2	1	1		6	10
400 - 499	-	-	3	1		4	6
500 - 599	1	-	1	5		7	11
600 - 699	-	-	1	3		4	6
700 - 799	-	1	-	1		2	3
800 or more ^{2/}	-	2	-	-		2	3
Unknown	-	-	-	1		1	2
Total	12	11	19	21		63	100.0
Average	\$230	\$740	\$240	\$370		\$370	

^{1/} S.S Farms depending on farm products for all cash income;
P.T Part-time farms;
N.F Farms with no cash farm income;
R Farms depending entirely on relief in some form.

^{2/} The 2 incomes were \$3000, \$3030.

Table 3. - Distribution according to size of farm
and income type

Acreage	Income Type				All Farms	
	S.S	P.T	N.F	R	Number	Percent
0 - 9	1	1	4	6	12	19
10 - 19	-	-	1	1	2	3
20 - 29	-	-	2	-	2	3
30 - 39	2	1	2	2	7	11
40 - 49	1	1	3	1	6	10
50 - 59	2	-	2	-	4	6
60 - 69	-	1	-	-	1	2
70 - 79	-	2	-	-	2	3
80 - 89	-	-	-	3	3	5
90 - 99	-	-	1	1	2	
100 - 149	3	3	-	1	7	11
150 - 199	1	2	-	1	4	6
200 - 299	-	-	-	1	1	2
300 or more	2 ^{1/}	-	-	1 ^{2/}	3	5
Indeterminate	-	-	4	3	7	11
Total	12	11	19	21	63	100
Averages	130	93	33	76	79	

^{1/} 301 and 445 acres.

^{2/} 300 acres.

Table 4. - Distribution of families according to tenure

Tenure	Number	Percentage
Owner	32	51
Rent - Lease	11	17
Squatter	13	21
Uncertain tenure	7	11
Total	63	100

Table 5. - Distribution of families by type of home

Type	Number	Percentage
Painted Frame	15	24
Unpainted Frame	18	28
Shack	27	43
Other	3	5
Total	63	100

Table 6. - Homes having conveniences as listed

Convenience	No. homes	Percent	Conveniences	No. homes	Percent
Electricity	1	2	Insurance	4	6
Telephone	0	0	Newspapers:		
Running Water	2	3	Daily only	9	14
Kitchen Sink	6	10	Weekly only	23	36
Washing Machines	7	11	Both	6	10
Refrigeration	0	0	Magazines:		
Automobile	11	18	Only one	25	40
Radio	26	41	Only two	10	16
			Three or more	3	5

Table 7. - Distribution of households
according to distances from services

Distance in miles	Services				
	: Hard road	: Church	: Grade school	: High school	: Doctor
0	9	-	-	-	-
0 - .9	31	38	35	-	-
1 - 1.9	17	22	16	-	-
2 - 2.9	6	3	2	-	-
3 - 3.9	-	-	6	-	-
4 - 5.9	-	-	4	-	-
6 - 7.9	-	-	-	7	-
8 - 9.9	-	-	-	22	-
10 - 14.9	-	-	-	20	-
15 - 19.9	-	-	-	-	-
20 - 24.9	-	-	-	2	2
25 - 29.9	-	-	-	12	61
Total	63	63	63	63	63
Average distance	1	1	1	14	27

Table 8. -- Population of problem area compared with
county, state, and national population, by
age groups

Age in years	Percent of Total in Each Age Group			
	Lewis County ^{1/} (All classes)	West Virginia ^{1/} (Rural farm)	United States ^{1/} (Rural farm)	Problem area
0 - 4	9	11	11	13
5 - 9	10	13	13	17
10 - 14	10	13	12	14
15 - 19	10	12	11	8
20 - 24	8	8	8	7
25 - 29	6	5	6	5
30 - 34	6	5	6	9
35 - 44	13	10	11	7
45 - 54	12	10	10	9
55 - 64	9	7	7	5
65 & Over	7	6	5	6
Total	100	100	100	100

^{1/} Figures from the 1930 Census.

Table 9. - Distribution of families, by family type

Type	Number	Percentage
Broken households	11	18
No children: head under 30	0	0
No children: head over 29	7 <u>1/</u>	11
Oldest child under 6 years	2	3
Oldest child 6 - 15 years	24	38
Oldest child 16 - 25 years	16	25
Oldest child over 25 years	3	5
Total	63	100

1/ Five are "remnant" families - elderly parents left alone by children's moving.

Table 10. - Children away from home, by sex and by place of present residence

Present home	Sons		Daughters	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Lewis County	9	39	13	28
Adjoining County	6	26	14	30
Elsewhere in W. Va.	7	31	11	23
Elsewhere in U. S.	1	4	9	19
Total	23	100	47	100

Table 11. -- Birthplace of husbands, wives, and parents of each

Place of birth	:		:		Husband's		Husband's		Wife's		Wife's	
	: Husband		Wife		father		mother		father		mother	
	:No.	Pct.	:No.	Pct.	:No.	Pct.	:No.	Pct.	:No.	Pct.	:No.	Pct.
Lewis County	35	60	19	34	18	31	15	26	11	20	10	18
W. Virginia	22	38	34	62	34	59	36	62	38	69	40	73
Other States	1	2	2	4	6	10	7	12	6	11	5	9
Total	58	100	55	100	58	100	58	100	55	100	55	100

Table 13. - Distribution of households according
to previous residence

Previous residence	: Number	: Percentage
Always lived in problem area	: 11	: 18
In problem area	: 28	: 44
In Lewis County	: 9	: 14
In adjoining county	: 11	: 18
Elsewhere in W. Va.	: 1	: 1
Outside W. Va.	: 3	: 5
Total	: 63	: 100

Table 12. - Distribution of residential mobility
according to income types

Residential Mobility	Income types				Total	
	S.S	P.T	R	N.F	Number	Percent
Never moved	4	4	3	-	11	17
Moved less than once every 10 years	5	1	3	2	11	17
Moved once every 5 to 10 years	2	2	5	5	14	22
Moved once every 3 to 5 years	-	1	4	2	7	11
Moved once every $2\frac{1}{2}$ to 3 years	-	2	3	5	10	16
Moved once every 2 to $2\frac{1}{2}$ years	-	-	2	1	3	5
Moved more frequently than every 2 years	1	1	1	3	6	10
Unknown	-	-	-	1	1	2
Total	12	11	21	19	63	100

